GOD IS NOTDEAD - Joshua 24:14-24

~~Servingthe Lord~~

I suppose it is natural to feel a little ambiguous about the task of preaching once a man has resigned, as I have done this week. It's a little like the :lame duck" public official who knows that very little can be accomplished between the time his successor has been elected and his own term has run out. The relationship has been broken; whatever influence there once was--is no more. And yet a minister nurtures the optimistic hope that somehow--all those hundreds of thousands of words add up to something; that something of lasting and significant value has been said or done. Ofcourse--there's no way of knowing; no way of measuring; yet the hope remains.

Pursuing this hope I spent sometime last week going over the sermons of the past six years to see what was said, and as is the case when one goes back over old work, I wasn't particularly impressed with anything but the sheer volume. I had hoped that I would discover one or two major themes that ran through my work, but none were apparent. And so I was driven to ask myself "How can I sum it all up? What's really important? I have four Sunday's left-how can I tie it all together on those four occasions?"

This morning's sermon, then, is my first answer to that series of questions. Under the general title "What a Man Can Believe" I will be attempting on four occasions, to leave with you a focus of the Christian message. Granted, the initial effort is rather basic. "God Is Not Dead." should not startle anyone, an yet given the particular way our culture believes in God, and given the recent theological school that proclaims that "God is Dead" I felt it was ~~something I needed to deal with~~. the place I needed to begin.

and we are shocked when the crime rate, drug addiction and prostitution remain. We've gained nothing but the replacement of horizontal ghettos with vetical ones. In short our logical analysis of the problem has been wrong, in neglecting the undefinable--the human element--the thousands of individual prople--each one of which with a reason for being the way he is.

Our theological thinking, likewise, gets hungup on logic. God simply doesn't fit into our scheme of things--and so we feel we have reason to doubt his existence. Yet this is not accurate either for statistics show that some 97% of the ppoulation does believe in God. What really has happened is this; we have stopped taking the possibility of God seriously. Basically God doesn't fit into our shceme of things and so we don't bother even trying to relate him to our lives. And yet we continue to affirm our belief--because it is proper or because we are frightened to let it go; or because it really doesn't matter much one way or ther other.

The philosopher Santayana once said: "The brute necessity of believing something so lng as life lasts does not justify any belief in particular." And Sydney Harris, writing for the Chicago Daily News expanded that thought in a recent editorial when he said: "The people who think that faith is a good thing to have, no matter what it is faith in, merely cheapen and debase the whole concept and turn what should be the quest for truth into a kind of spiritual therapy."

I don't know about defining faith as the "quest for truth," but I do think Harris has pinpointed the problem. As a culture we have deified the act of having faith, while at the same time excluding any specific affirmations regarding the subject or object of faith. In fact, then Pres. Eisenhower summed it up when he said; "American Democracy today is basedon faith, and I don't care what kind of faith it is." By the way, D. E. is a Presbyterian.

this nation strayed from God--and found itself defeated and destroyed this is what God is like. The Bible says a man who walked through the valley of death-felt a nearness, a comfort and a strength this is what God is like.

And so, as we seek to know God as a living reality through the Bible--we need to understnad what the Biblical writers had in mind. And clearly they hd in mind the unexplainable, mysterious presence they had experienced and what they called God. The Bible, then, becomes the signpost, the pointer for the modern reader. It says to him--this is what God was like to us-and this is what he is like eternally.

We need, then,to do our theological homework in the depth of our own experience--our own history. We need to know God as the creator; not so much as the creator of the universe--for that is, perhaps, a thought too distant from us; but as the one who created us--the one who gave life to us and our parents, and our children. We need to know God the creator as the one who brings newness and life to our rather unexceptional existences. We need to know God as one who loves and cares--not so much for all his creatures--but for us; the one who accompanies and strengthens us when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

We need to know God as redeemer--not so much of the whoel human race, but as the source of redemption and healing in our lives. Haven't we ever experieced reconciliation? Haven't we ever experienced the forgiveness of another-the closing of a wide gap between ourselves and another person. We need to know that this is what God is like.